

Buhl Day honored guests: Bretton and Stacey Walberg

By MELISSA KLARIC Herald Staff Writer

Sep 3, 2021



2021 Buhl Day honorees Bretton and Stacey Walberg stroll along Lake Julia at Buhl Park. The Walbergs own and operate Walberg Family Pharmacies, which vaccinated 43,000 people against COVID-19, the equivalent of nearly half the population of Mercer County.

TANNER MONDOK | Herald

HERMITAGE – When pandemic-weary western Pennsylvania residents clamored earlier this year for difficult-to-get COVID-19 vaccines, Bretton and Stacey Walberg stepped up.

At this year’s Buhl Day celebration on Monday, the pair will be honored for their efforts.

The Walbergs’ organization – Walberg Family Pharmacies – was one of the first to start administering the vaccine locally. They organized more than 30 clinics and vaccinated more than 43,000 people. The clinics are still running – most recently at Thiel College and in Jamestown to vaccinate students ages 12 and older.

“We certainly are willing to vaccinate whomever needs it, because it’s truly the only way we’re going to be healthy,” Bretton said. “I don’t think we’re ever going to get rid of it, because we don’t have enough people getting the vaccine, but we’re certainly going to protect more and more folks that are willing. All willing arms.”

The Walbergs said the clinics were a team effort that collected assistance from pharmacy employees and beyond. At first, their 13 pharmacists tried to handle all the vaccinations, but it was very taxing, Bretton said.

Then, retired nurses and physicians started volunteering, along with high school students and a school nurse.

“It was a true community effort that came about,” Bretton said. “It was just so humbling to see all the people that wanted to help.”

It was truly a family effort as both Stacey and Bretton took part in the clinics along with their sons, 18-year-old Keaton, who is now a freshman at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University in Daytona, and 16-year-old Rylan, a junior at Greenville Area High School.

Bretton also praised state Sen. Michele Brooks of Jamestown, who he said fought to get the vaccine.

“She was very influential and probably the reason we received all the vaccines in the beginning and then on through,” Bretton said. “She was there fighting – not just for us to receive the vaccine – but she was fighting so we could vaccinate our communities.”

Bretton said he encourages people to get the vaccine because vaccinated people are less likely to experience severe effects, including death, than those who have not been vaccinated.

Stacey and Bretton met at Grove City College in their freshman year – actually on day one of college. After their freshman year, Bretton transferred to Ohio Northern to attend pharmacy school, and they continued their relationship from there.

The couple got married in 1998 and bought their first pharmacy, the former Jamestown Pharmacy, from Bretton's parents in 1999. They expanded and now own 11 retail pharmacies and a long-term care packaging pharmacy in Mercer, Lawrence, Crawford and Butler counties.

“We were very excited,” Bretton said. “We opened up additional stores as we went along.”

Bretton said he would be happy to have one of his sons take over the family business, but he and Stacey support all their endeavors.

Rylan plays soccer and participates in school musicals and plays; Keaton played the trumpet, competed in tennis and was also part of the school musicals and plays. All of this kept the parents active volunteering at the school.

“They kept us busy, they kept us running,” Stacey said.

“If there's anything we try to do is we try to convince our kids and teach them that giving back to our communities is so important,” Bretton said. “It's always more important to help the people than it is to receive money.”

Stacey said she believes her sons and the other young people who volunteered really enjoyed it.

“I really think that just seeing the people and the smiles on their faces and the relief,” Stacey said. “I think it was very eye-opening for these guys to see.”

And their son agrees.

“It was also very rewarding to see everyone so happy,” Rylan said.

Stacey said the students put in long hours helping out at the clinics. They gave up their Saturdays to come to the clinic at 6 a.m. and stayed all day.

Farrell Area School District closed and went to online learning for a day in order to hold a clinic there. Thiel College offered the Passavant Center to the Walbergs whenever they needed it.

“It’s just one of those really neat things,” Bretton said. “People moved mountains where they could move mountains to be able to get people immunized.”

Beyond scheduling several vaccination clinics and volunteering at Greenville schools, the Walbergs serve in other capacities in the community.

Bretton is on the board of directors of St. Paul’s Senior Living Community in West Salem Township, the finance committees for Greenville First Presbyterian Church and for Fresh Grounds coffee house in, Greenville, and on the board of Salvation Army.

They are active members of the church, and as a family, try to help out where they are needed in the community.

Stacey and Bretton said they were shocked and humbled to be named as Buhl Day honored guests.

“Everything we have done for COVID, we did for the community,” Stacy said. “We had the ability to help the community. That was our goal – not to win awards.” Bretton said the vaccination campaign was about the community.

“We’re not just representing ourselves,” he said. “We’re representing our 120 employees, our volunteers of the community.”

“If there’s anything we try to do is we try to convince our kids and teach them that giving back to our communities is so important.”

Bretton Walberg